

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 48

By Chism

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Dr. James LaVirt Netters, Sr., of Memphis.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Dr. James LaVirt Netters, Sr.; and

WHEREAS, Dr. James Netters was an exemplary public servant and community leader who fervently dedicated his life to God as a vessel of his love, grace, and mercy; and

WHEREAS, born in Aliceville, Alabama, on September 10, 1927, Dr. James Netters was the oldest of three sons born to Phillip Netters, Sr., and Bessie Ball Netters, and he attended school with his brothers, Willie James and Phillip Jr.; and

WHEREAS, the Netters family relocated to Memphis in 1942, and Dr. Netters graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in 1946 and was subsequently drafted into the United States Army. He later earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from LeMoyne College in 1963 and attended Memphis Theological Seminary, from which he earned a Master of Divinity degree in 1987 and a Doctor of Ministry degree in 1994; and

WHEREAS, Dr. James Netters married his high school sweetheart, Leona Jones, on November 25, 1948, and the couple's marriage was blessed with three children, five grandchildren, and ten great-grandchildren. James and Leona Netters enjoyed fifty-seven years of marriage before her passing in 2005, and he was honored to serve as her faithful and devoted caregiver for the final ten years of her life; and

WHEREAS, answering his call to the ministry, Dr. Netters was ordained by Reverend L.O. Taylor at Olivet Baptist Church in 1955 and was installed as pastor at Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in October 1956, at which time he began ministering to the youth and the larger community; and

WHEREAS, after completing his undergraduate education in 1963, he accepted a teaching position with Memphis City Schools and became active in the Civil Rights Movement.

He traveled to Washington, D.C., and was on stage as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech; and

WHEREAS, the following year, Dr. Netters was among the first persons arrested during the bus sit-in demonstrations in Memphis, which demonstrations led to the integration of the city buses just weeks later; and

WHEREAS, in a truly historic moment for the City of Memphis, Dr. James Netters won election to the new Memphis City Council in 1967, becoming one of the council's first three African-American councilmen; and

WHEREAS, during his first year as councilman, the sanitation strike began, bringing national labor and civil rights leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to Memphis. Dr. Netters worked tirelessly in public and behind the scenes, ultimately playing an instrumental role in working out an agreement to end the strike, which, unfortunately, Dr. King did not live to see resolved; and

WHEREAS, completing his service on the council in 1971, Dr. James Netters then became the first African American to serve as an administrative assistant to a mayor of the City of Memphis, serving with Mayor Wyeth Chandler from 1972 to 1975; and

WHEREAS, a longtime member of the board of commissioners of Memphis Light, Gas, and Water Division, Dr. Netters served a tenure there as interim president and chief executive officer; the "James L. Netters Business Center" at the utility is named in his honor; and

WHEREAS, he also rendered sterling service as a member of the Regional Medical Center Clerical Advisory Board and the Progressive National Baptist Convention; and

WHEREAS, no stranger to awards and accolades for his service in religious, civil, and political capacities, Dr. Netters received honorary doctorates from Oral Roberts University and LeMoyne-Owen College. Of special note is the establishment of the Dr. James L. Netters Professorship and Faculty Chair of Rhetoric and African American Studies at Memphis Theological Seminary; and

WHEREAS, he was also deeply devoted to his family, and he always endeavored to remain true to family values of the highest order; and

WHEREAS, a beloved family patriarch, Dr. James Netters was the proud father of Edwinta Leona, James LaVirt, Jr., and Chandra Danette and the treasured grandfather of five grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Netters leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TWELFTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Dr. James LaVirt Netters, Sr., reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Dr. Netters.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy and upon proper request made to the appropriate clerk, the language appearing immediately following the State seal appear without House or Senate designation.